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SUBJECT: SON OF SLAIN POLITICIAN OUTLINES HIS OWN POLITICAL AMBITIONS

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

¶1. (S) Reza Kibria, son of slain Awami League leader Shah AMS Kibria, said on October 8 that he continued to press Bangladesh authorities to investigate properly his father's assassination. Kibria also told the Ambassador about his aspirations to fill his father's shoes as a Member of Parliament and even as Finance Minister should the Awami League win the December national elections. Kibria expressed doubts, however, that elections would occur. Finally, he noted the increasing involvement of Saudi Arabia in Bangladeshi domestic affairs.

The Investigation

¶2. (C) In an October 8 meeting, Reza Kibria updated the Ambassador on the status of the investigation into his father's assassination. (NOTE: Awami League parliamentarian and former Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria and four others died in a January 2005 grenade attack at an Awami League rally. END NOTE.) Despite September 2008 media reports that Home Affairs Adviser M.A. Matin had ordered a new investigation into the assassination, Kibria told the Ambassador of his family's belief that Bangladesh police continued to cover up the circumstances surrounding his father's death. (NOTE: The Kibria family, including Kibria's U.S.-based sister, consistently maintain that the then-government led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) played a role in the grenade attack that killed Shah AMS Kibria. The family claims authorities have covered up the BNP's role in their various investigations of the incident. END NOTE.)

¶3. (C) Kibria said only the involvement of international bodies, for example the United Nations, could ensure a proper and effective investigation. While complimentary of Adviser Matin's leadership of the Home Ministry, Kibria was highly critical of Matin's deputy, Home Secretary Md. Abdul Karim; Kibria asserted that Karim was protecting a district commissioner of police Kibria believed was implicated in his father's death.

The Election

¶4. (C) Kibria said he would run for Parliament in the December elections, though he voiced concern that he faced a

higher risk of assassination given his father's fate. Kibria expressed a need for effective protection since his own death could act to delay the electoral process. He believed he would win a seat in Parliament based on father's popularity. However, Kibria went on to say he did not believe the election would occur as scheduled. According to Kibria, administrative and organizational deadlines and the possibility of disruptions would prevent the election. Finally, Kibria said free and fair elections would not occur in Bangladesh until the prevalence of "black" money and weapons declined.

Saudi Arabian Influence in Bangladesh

¶5. (S) Kibria voiced concern about what he called the growing influence of Saudi-funded groups in Bangladesh. Without identifying his source, he claimed the Saudi Arabian government pressured the Bangladesh judiciary to approve the bail petition of Jamaat-e-Islami leader Motiur Rahmen Nizami, who had been jailed on corruption charges. This pressure allegedly took the form of threats to expel 500,000 Bangladeshi workers from Saudi Arabia if Nizami's bail was not granted. (NOTE: The courts granted Nizami bail in July ¶2008. END NOTE.)

Comment

¶6. (C) The Embassy continues to press the Government of Bangladesh for a full investigation of the attack that killed

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Shah AMS Kibria. On October 7 Embassy officials urged Home Ministry officials to follow up promptly on the Home Adviser's order to re-investigate the crime. Reza Kibria, an economist who has spent much of his professional career abroad, spoke frankly about his political ambitions. Like many current figures in both Bangladesh's main political parties, Kibria's political credentials are based more on his father's prominence in the party than his own base of support. Should Kibria and the Awami League prevail in December, it is possible he would be granted a Cabinet position, though some doubt that he could secure such a significant role as Finance Minister.

Moriarty